

Colorado Center on Law and Policy

Health Law and Policy Update: January 31, 2014

Open enrollment continues

Individuals and small businesses can now shop for health insurance through [Connect for Health Colorado](#), Colorado's new health insurance marketplace. Sign up for coverage now.

This week's updates:

- [President Obama praises ACA](#)
- [Negotiators agree on new Farm Bill](#)
- [Connect for Health Colorado enrollment update](#)

President Obama praises ACA

On Tuesday January 28th, President Obama delivered his fifth State of the Union address. The speech focused on solutions to income inequality and the importance of raising the minimum wage, and highlighted the benefits of the Affordable Care Act.

"Already, because of the Affordable Care Act, more than 3 million Americans under age 26 have gained coverage under their parents' plans. More than 9 million Americans have signed up for private health insurance or Medicaid coverage -- 9 million.

"And here's another number: zero. Because of this law, no American, none, zero, can ever again be dropped or denied coverage for a pre-existing condition like asthma or back pain or cancer. No woman can ever be charged more just because she's a woman. And we did all this while adding years to Medicare's finances, keeping Medicare premiums flat and lowering prescription costs for millions of seniors."

Watch the full speech at [CSPAN.org](#). The Washington Post provides the [full transcript](#) of the this year's State of the Union address.

Negotiators agree on new Farm Bill

On Monday January 27th, House and Senate negotiators agreed to a new version of the Farm bill, capping two years of contentious debate over cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, known as SNAP or "food stamps." The final agreement, which passed the House on Wednesday January 29th, includes \$8 billion in cuts to the SNAP program but does not include the \$40 billion in cuts that passed the House in September.

The cuts in the final agreement end the ability of states to increase SNAP benefits to households by providing them with a nominal heating or cooling assistance payment from the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, or LIHEAP. About one third of states, not including Colorado, provide a small (i.e. \$1) LIHEAP benefit to low-income households to simplify utility cost calculations and increase the SNAP benefits these households receive. Under the agreement, low-income households will now need to receive at least \$20 in LIHEAP benefits to qualify for additional SNAP benefits.

The cuts are expected to affect 1.7 million people nationwide, reducing the average SNAP benefit in these households by \$90 per month.

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities published [a commentary](#) on the final agreement earlier this week.

Connect for Health Colorado enrollment update

Connect for Health Colorado, Colorado's state-based health insurance marketplace, announced January 31 that over 69,000 people have enrolled in coverage since October 1, 2013. January alone saw 16,000 additional sign-ups. We anticipate the rate of enrollments will remain strong through the end of this year's open enrollment period, which is March 31.

Patty Fontneau, Connect for Health's CEO, also announced in her weekly [blog post](#) that the marketplace is making a new marketing push with new advertisements featuring testimonials for consumers who enrolled in coverage. CCLP is pleased these testimonials refer to how tax credits are making insurance more affordable for Coloradans.

See the new advertisements [here](#).